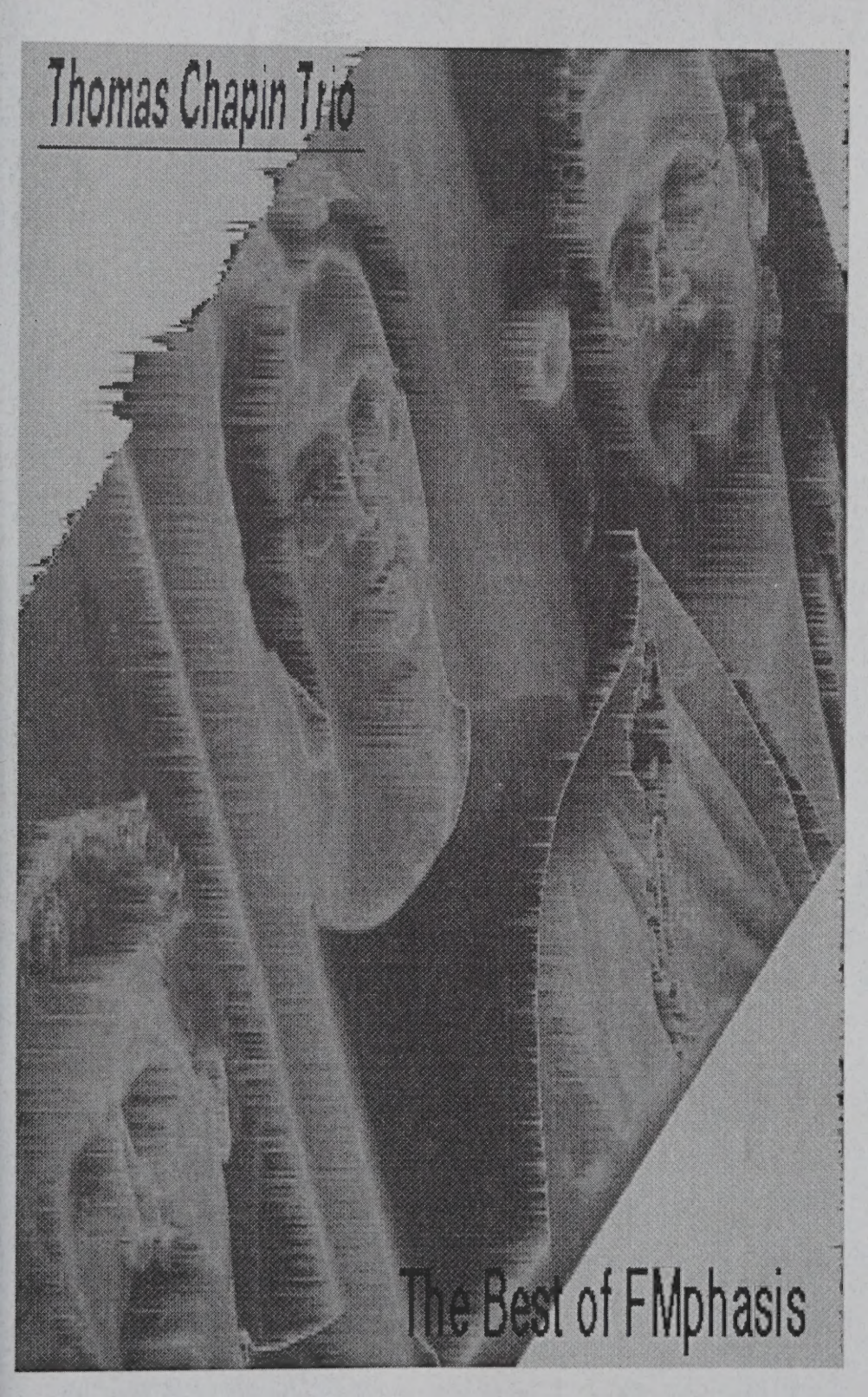


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The Best of FMphasis

FMphasis

**The magazine of WRMC, 91.1 FM,
Middlebury College**

'Home of the aural exciter'

**Edited, pasted, rendered, sewn, patched, and even
stapled by Pauls Toutonghi**

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Tori on Tori

by Bryan Stratton

(Tori Amos gave a phone conference interview on Sunday, 4 February 1996. While your humble interviewer was never able to actually *ask* Ms. Amos a question, due to selfish persons ignoring the "five-minute question" rule, he did record the interview, from which excerpts were taken to make this article.)

* * * * *

In Little Earthquakes, it seemed like fragments of an autobiography. In Under the Pink, the songs seemed like short stories, perhaps. I don't know quite what to make of Boys for Pele's lyrics and the order in which they're arranged. I was wondering if you could explain that.

Well, I suggest a bottle of red. (laughs) And, second of all... it's like a novel to me, it's the descent of this woman, to find fragments of herself. The record is very much in the order of how the songs wanted to be presented; they kind of made it quite clear to me, even in the recording, where they wanted to go. There were two that shifted position by the end, but, everything else, even as I was putting them down, I knew what the story was becoming; they were showing me.

And it's a metaphorical work; if you're using your head, you're kinda in trouble. You really have to go from your senses. It's what things represent, more than what a word means. It's association, and if you go through it that way, you're responding from your instincts.... This is a heart record; if you use your brain, you won't get it.

* * * * *

What is the weirdest thing to ever happen to you on tour?

Hmm... um... I'm thinking. Weird things happen a lot, just because, you're not in a normal setting, and people do strange things. It's sort of like a traveling circus. So, to be honest with you, I think most of it's weird, but I enjoy it. And, you know, I'm not a decadent party person; that doesn't really interest me. I'm interested in having really, really good wine on

the bus afterwards; I'm interested in having catered Asian food.

And when people and friends cruise on my bus, they have a really great time, and a good meal and good wine. It's usually about the fascinating people that cruise through; some of them are writers, medicine women or physicists. Very rarely do the musicians cruise through, because a lot of them are on tour at the same time, and they always come back and say, "Where's the party?" That's not how it really works with my circus. This is very... European (laughs), thus far, anyway.

But the people are fascinating. That's what I love about the touring; you meet so many fascinating people.

* * * * *

If you could have changed anything in your past that was unpleasant, what would it be, and how would it affect the artist, Tori Amos?

I would change... the fact that I can't intake fat very well, because I love fat so much. It doesn't wear well on me. So that's what I would change.

No, to be honest... the other thing is that you can't look back as a writer, you really can't. I have the power to change anything I want to change now as a writer if I don't like what I'm up to. And I always hope that I'm changing, or it gets repetitive.

* * * * *

Have you always liked playing with fire?

Yeah, I like matches and fire. I like fire a lot. I'm a bit of a pyro. But I'm not a successful one. So there you go.

* * * * *

You've always written, and you speak, very metaphorically. Have you always seen the world like that?

I guess so. I don't remember making it a conscious effort to see the world differently. Alice In Wonderland was always my favorite. Ever since I read that as a little girl, I felt like I had to live in that land to make sense of

what was going on around me. So every time that something would happen (I grew up in a really religious home), I would go down the rabbit hole to try and figure out what just happened. Nothing linear made sense to me.

It was quite harsh in that — not that the people were mean; I'm not suggesting that — but that the level of expansion was nil for a creative mind, for a passionate heart, for all those sort of things. It was very much "we think this way, we do this, Jesus is this, Mary is this, a good girl is this, a bad girl is this, and if you think this way, everything will be just fine." Well, it was so constraining that I would just nod my head and go down the rabbit hole and try to figure out what these crazy people were thinking. It was very much about how can I have freedom of thought and expression? I lived in a metaphorical world.

* * * * *

Can you explain your connection with Pele?

Pele is the volcano goddess of Hawaii, and I fled to Hawaii in the middle of the Under the Pink tour for five days when I was at my lowest, and I couldn't feel any fire in myself. I couldn't feel anything. And as soon as I hit the islands, I just felt this force, and I began to think, "How can I begin to feel even one one-billionth of this force without having to get it through somebody else, steal it, buy it; how can I feel this inside?" And that was the beginning.

* * * * *

In your new album, the picture with you breast-feeding the pig? I don't understand what that's all about.

Well, the pig represents to me the "non-kosher," the things that are not acceptable, the things that are rejected and hidden and judged, and I think that, well, there's been so much of it in my life, but I see so much of it all over the planet. People are programmed to discard what they "should not" feel, instead of seeing that maybe if we're all honest with ourselves, you won't have all these child molesters running around, and all these murderers, and all this crazy shit happening, and these rapists, because you turn into crazy creatures and violent creatures when you're not looking at your unconscious.

So nursing the pig is about nursing that back to you, bringing it back, whatever that is, if that's eroticism, if you're afraid of that, that's part of it.

* * * * *

Do you have a preference between Bach and Mozart, by any chance?

Bach and Mozart? Well, the truth is, and don't take this wrong, I really like physicists, mathematicians, those kinds of men, and I think Bach would probably be a better lay, because, I think he'd just be more multi-dimensional. I would love Mozart, but he's probably sort of like RuPaul, you know? (laughs) Who I adore, but I don't think you're going to get much headway there.

Learning the harpsichord, I had to open myself up to Bach.... God, what a mind. That makes me think that there was a tidal wave held back — oh my God, I'm sounding like a romance novel! (laughs)

* * * * *

Whatever happened to the song you recorded with Michael Stipe for the Don Juan de Marcos soundtrack?

Well, that song is our little troll. We call it our little green troll. And I really adored that song. Um... they didn't understand it, over at Don Juan. (laughs) They went with a Bryan Adams track instead. Fair enough; it did them very well.

They wanted something, they said, whimsical.... I think snakes with a great bottle of Chardonnay and strawberries is really sexual (laughs), so their concept and our concept were really different. Michael's the kind of person that will dive off a cliff with you if you want to dive, and they really didn't know what to do with it.

So, after that — oh, the Chilis came and played with us, Flea came and played, and Dave Navarro came and played — and, I think we'll release it, we'll remix it and release it one day. But after the whole movie thing, I just got sick of the whole movie... some movie director decides if they like it or not, you know; fuck off. You don't understand it. You just don't understand what we were doing here. You don't understand little green trolls.

* * * * *

Many people have a misconception of what "feminism" really means. How would you explain it?

Well, the word "feminist"... I think feminism is dead. And I'll tell you why. And, don't get me wrong, dead is a good thing. I mean, Jesus died, after all. It's not a bad thing to die.

But it's about transforming, and the female part of God, that whole concept that has not been passed down in the religions, and I'm not talking about the Marys, I'm talking about the female, feminine part of God. The religions have been patriarchal, there's just no question about it. Not that they should be matriarchal; I think some men are much more in touch with their feminine than some women are right now. But it's about the birth of the feminine.

Being a feminist was very much about penetrating and infiltrating the patriarchy and finding a place with that. The only problem with that is, the patriarchy, because it hasn't had the feminine, is hierarchical. Many of the women, me included, who penetrated the patriarchy, fell into this game of domination and control. Well, for this thing to go to its next steps where God, the idea of God, the male and the female together, there can be no hierarchy, not in truth. And that's on a respect level; that doesn't mean that somebody doesn't have more skill in one area and somebody has less skill and they can learn from them. But it's about the domination and control aspect.

That's why I talk about "the feminine." I'm not a feminist. I was, and I learned a lot, and now I'm working on pulling in the feminine. My Viking is alive and well; we've stolen lots of babes this year, now we kind of need to be a little more sensitive.

Bryan Stratton is a WRMC DJ and works actively to restore peace, harmony, and the American Way to the Middlebury Campus.

Editor's Note by Pauls Toutonghi

Well, here we go again. Another year at Middlebury College. And another year of FMphasis. We're off to a flying start, as far as I'm concerned. Absolutely *flying*. We've got wings, we've got take-off, we've got life insurance in case we're on TWA.

Each of the past two years have seen one issue of FMphasis appear. While this is not the most prodigious output of any magazine on campus, I like to think that what we lost in quantity, we made up for in quality. It's a nice thought. Completely delusional, but nice, nonetheless.

This editor's note won't be as political as the last one. It's 10 pm on Monday night, and, as I said before, I'm tired, and all by myself in this little room. I'm really, really tired. And I don't really understand the Pagemaker program, although I have to admit it's a wonderful tool! (I'm sending this edition to Aldus, in hopes of corporate sponsorship).

But censorship is still as big an issue as ever. Jesse Helms is alive and well. The NEA is still an embattled organization. These are all sad things.

On the bright side, poetry is as beautiful as ever. If you look out your window during the day, odds are you'll see the sun. What an incredible thing, the sun! And I've been reading some cool poets recently: Adrienne Rich, William Stafford, Gary Soto, John Milton.

Remember: Your father is a wonderful person. You don't call him enough. Call him more. He's mis-understood. And do your homework. Don't over-eat. Love your leader. Love your brother. Bury your bigness. Be a superhero. Choose life. Choose a job. If you happen to be Brutus—go ahead, you big idiot, choose to conspire against Julius Caesar. Choose the Ides of March.

But that was a bit of rambling.

There will be another issue.

I swear.

- Pauls, 9.23.96

What I Did This Spring (or My Everclear Road Trip)

by Little Bryan Stratton, age 20

We departed scenic Middlebury, Vermont at 2:30 pm that fateful February 15th, "we" being myself and Intrepid Companion Zeb (last name omitted to protect his anonymity). Slightly downhearted at our inability to get Dave Matthews tickets for the following evening, we hoped that the promised double-bill of Foo Fighters and Everclear in Montreal would salve our pain.

Intrepid Companion Zeb's \$300 Engine of Destruction (cleverly disguised as a slightly used white Nissan Sentra) had us to Burlington by 3:15 pm and, pausing only for a quick sip of gas, to the Canadian border by 4:00.

"Have you ever been convicted of a felony misdemeanor?" the Jolly Border Guard asked Intrepid Companion Zeb, after the latter had taken five minutes to find his driver's licence (deviously hidden in his wallet, of all places).

"No," replied Intrepid Companion Zeb, thoughtfully adding, "I've never gone to court."

"Pull over to the left, and bring this ticket inside," the Jolly Border Guard cheerfully ordered.

We were back on the road by 4:25, Intrepid Companion Zeb grumbling that, when asked if he had any offensive weapons in the car, he should have replied, "No sir. All our weapons are used for purely defensive purposes." But said grumbings quickly faded with our pursuit of that elusive beast, Montreal.

"The sky's awful big around here," noted Intrepid Companion Zeb.

"This whole country is too flat..." I muttered. "They must be up to something."

The Engine of Destruction, purring along at 50 MPH (or approximately 780 kMPH), quickly brought us to a fork in the road.

"Which way?" asked Intrepid Companion Zeb.

"There's a big building straight ahead that says 'Club Erotica,'" I observed, squinting my eyes.

"Straight ahead it is," decided Intrepid Companion Zeb.

We finally started seeing road signs for our destination after a lovely little town called Iberville (which we blew right through and never looked back at). The signs, appropriately enough, began at 69 kilometers to Montreal.

"Keep it under 350 kilos per," I advised Intrepid Companion Zeb. "They're monitoring us by aircraft surveillance."

"Fuck you, Stratton," growled Intrepid Companion Zeb as we continued to sit in deadlocked traffic.

A young boy jumped out of a limousine to our right to relieve himself behind an overpass support. As soon as he left the security of his vehicle, traffic in the right lane began to move, and the limousine was forced to move with it. Intrepid Companion Zeb and I never actually saw the boy get back into the limo, but we did enjoy several impolite jokes at the unwitting boy's expense, involving clown suits and felonies too unpleasant to go into here.

Finally, at approximately 6:00 pm, we reached the Jewel of the Oceans, Montreal. Intrepid Companion Zeb ditched the Engine of Destruction near a Wendy's (the only name we knew we could trust in that city of cutthroats and thieves), and we walked a short distance to a tourist information center, which was unhelpfully closed. We knew the name of our destination was "Club Soda," but we had no idea of its location.

A quick dinner at McDonald's brought us a clue as to where we were going. The young lady at the counter knew where Club Soda was: "on Metro Park somewhere."

"Can you give us directions to Metro Park?" I asked.

"No... I can't help..." she valiantly replied in English that, while broken, was a hell of a lot better than my French.

"Is it near?" I asked.

"Oh no..." she emphatically replied.

"Great," muttered Intrepid Companion Zeb.

To cut a long story short, Intrepid Companion Zeb and I did eventually find Club Soda, after consulting two other McDonald's employees, a Burger King cashier, an old man who ran a newspaper shop that sold mostly porn, a sales clerk at a computer store, and two ladies at two separate small grocery stores (which the French, I'm told, call *magasins*, which is not to be confused with a magazine, which the Germans call *Zeitschriften*).

We entered the door to Club Soda two hours after our quest for it had begun, both numb with cold, me with jeans ripped in the crotch from dodging traffic (another story for another time) and Intrepid Companion Zeb trying to decide if he was disgruntled or ecstatic, which is the case with Intrepid Companion Zeb, more often than not.

Our FREE! tickets were waiting for us at the box office, where we learned that Foo Fighters were not on the bill, even though Rolling Stone had said they would be. "One more reason to hate Rolling Stone," I jotted down in my notebook.

To warm our chilled bones, Intrepid Companion Zeb and I treated ourselves to two completely legal beers which cost \$150 each, Canadian (which was, we worked out, nearly a buck-seventy American). Shortly thereafter, we lapsed into a state of near-slumber, brought on either by the impossibly-potent Canadian brew or the opening band, Pez. Pez sounded like Hole with no talent, that is, they sounded like Hole.

The next band, a three-man power-pop outfit, took the stage. "All right!" Intrepid Companion Zeb and I exclaimed. "Everclear!" We dashed forward, through the waist-high crowd of fourteen-year-olds, for prime spots near the stage.

After we didn't recognize the first three songs, Intrepid Companion Zeb and I became suspicious. When the singer announced the band as "Ruth Ruth, from New York," we backed out of the mosh puddle and tried to look cool leaning against a railing, hoping that no one else had noted our embarrassing blunder.

Ruth Ruth (or, as I christened them, Weezer Day) played for an hour. "They were fine," he said snobbily, "if that's the sort of thing you're in to." During the last ten minutes of the set, Intrepid Companion Zeb caught a glimpse of Everclear frontman Art Alexakis' black fingernails peering out from the backstage curtain. The fun was about to start.

Ruth Ruth finished their set and Intrepid Companion Zeb and I forced our way to the front of the crowd, which, believe me, was a lot easier than it sounds. We maneuvered ourselves to the right side of the stage, immediately in front of where we knew Art would be standing.

Twenty minutes passed. Finally, the background music from the PA system faded out, and Art walked out with his guitar, playing a solo version of "Strawberry." This was the first chance I had to get a good look at him.

Art Alexakis looks like a young Lou Reed, if Lou Reed was ever young. He's about 33 years old, but fifteen years of drug abuse have aged him considerably past that. With his blond hair and his slightly shy demeanor, one could almost mistake him for a Kurt Cobain who had made some smarter decisions in life.

The most striking feature about him, though, was the broad grin on his face. The lyrics to most Everclear songs are so full of pain and rage that one might assume that their writer must be the most miserable man on earth, when, in actuality, their writer was the most miserable man on earth, but he got better. The smile that he wore when he came out widened even further when he realized just how much of the audience knew the lyrics to his songs, for which he was grateful; he must have thanked the crowd ten times that evening, somehow managing to not come off as insincere by doing so.

After "Strawberry," the band flew into "Electra Made Me Blind," the first song from their second album, *Sparkle and Fade*. They played a consistently high-energy show for a good hour; the intensity did not lag even during some of the slower songs, such as "Fire Maple Song" off of *World of Noise*. On CD, their two albums total about an hour and a half, which meant that they were able to cycle through just about every tune they had before finishing with a furiously distorted version of Tom Petty's "American Girl."

And what were Intrepid Companion Zeb and I doing during the whole performance? Well, besides sweating profusely and enjoying ourselves thoroughly, we were selfishly trying to distract Art as much as possible, so he would pay attention to US! I held out my hand, which he shook, during "Your Genius Hands," and Intrepid Companion Zeb threw a wrapped condom on stage during "My Sexual Life."

Though he tried to ignore us, it was all in vain. After the show, when the band came back out to sign autographs, Art mentioned to Intrepid Companion Zeb that he saw that he knew all the lyrics, which made Intrepid Companion Zeb blush like a schoolgirl. After signing my Canadian two-dollar bill (it was only worth about \$0.13 American, I figured), he mentioned that I looked like I was having a good time out there. I assured him I did and mentioned that I would be writing up the show in my college's music magazine, about which he was quite pleased.

We left Club Soda at around 12:45 am, February 16th and enjoyed a brisk seven-mile walk back to the car, pausing only for the essential cups of 250 Fahrenheit (35 Celsius) LeMcDonald's coffee, which we hoarded like caffeine-dependent packrats for the ride home. The Engine of Destruction was right where we left it, no one having messed with it because they knew better. The ride home took only two hours, as Intrepid Companion Zeb made sure to fly low enough to avoid radar.

We trudged into Coffrin at 3:00 am, deaf, sore, and exhausted. Scant minutes later, we were safe and sound in our respective beds, dreaming happy little dreams in the sparkle and fade.

Yes, this is the same *Bryan Stratton* from the previous article. He's a nice guy and a good writer. So deal.

Glowing Skulls In The Toast

possibly by Ian "Naki" Brand

Almost a year ago (like, November 1995) I had a chance to sit down with a few members of the Voodoo Glow Skulls, a punk/ska/hardcore outfit from southern California after their show at Club Toast. After I asked Eddie (the guitarist) for an interview, he invited us: myself and my friends Dave and Will, back into the tour bus, which was very plushly equipped. The Glow Skulls had a cooler for beer, some comfortable couches and a large TV. We proceeded to converse, rather nervously, with Eddie while Frank (the singer) sucked on a rather large can of Budweiser, George (the bassist) sucked on a bong with various punk rock stickers on it, including a very cool Glow Skulls sticker right at the top, and Jerry (the drummer) attempted to change in the back, but ended up instead throwing his underwear, a pair of white boxers speckled with powder blue dots (the type most often found on old men who shop at K-Mart), into the middle of the bus and running around with no pants on. After we caught long and illuminating glimpses of Jerry's ass, we decided it was time to start the interview. Unfortunately, we only got to interview four members of the seven member outfit because the horn players were either too busy falling asleep or trying to seduce our bountiful beautiful Vermont women at the bar.

I now wish that I had prepared questions for the interview, but Dave had just gotten out of an exam and found a more pressing need to get shitfaced, so I halfheartedly joined him (don't worry, mom, Will drove). Still, I feel that the three of us fared decently in our endeavor, especially when you consider that Jerry's ass flailing around the bus had practically shocked us beyond all endeavors at thought and that my tape recorder made probably the shittiest recording I might have ever heard. Something like that...

How long have you guys been on the road?

Eddie—We've been on the road for three weeks and we have about two weeks left. Halloween was the midpoint of the tour.

How many dates?

Eddie—Forty. Well, I think thirty-seven or thirty-eight shows but we'll be gone for forty days. We have the whole east coast, the rest of it, and the south..

Is this your first time on the east coast?

Eddie—Well, it's actually our second time, but it's our first time this far north. We've never been to Boston, we've never been to Vermont. We've never been really this far. We've been to New York twice and New Haven twice.

This tour is to promote your new album. How would you say that album compares to "Who is, This is?"?

Eddie—I think it sounds a lot better in terms of the sound quality. The production blows it away. The [new] record had a whole bunch of money behind it and we had an awesome producer who totally worked his ass off for this record. It took a whole month to record. The first album only took four days to record.

Frank—Mixing and everything.

Eddie—Yeah, so it's a better sounding album. There's some older songs on this record. Like four or five tracks that are just punk rock songs were some of the first songs we ever wrote, and that's kinda cool because we're going back to our roots and everything. It's still ska and punk, but it's more punk rock. I think it's just more of the same.

Frank—More of what we actually started doing. More punk rock than anything.

Eddie—But the ska is still there and so we use ska in parts of our songs.

You said during the show that people were saying that you were trying to front on the ska scene. What do you think about that?

Eddie—Well, we don't anymore, we just like to talk shit. There haven't been that many problems, but once in a while we get shit from guys who are just into ska and think we're trying to mess up their music scene when, in fact, we're just doing our own thing. We're trying to do our own scene. We're not part of any ska scene, we want to do our own thing. But we like ska. We like a lot of ska bands and we're really into it, but we're not trying to do that. We're just trying to do our own thing. We happen to like ska and we happen to like punk rock and hardcore, and we like all

kinds of music. One style of music that we do is ska, but we also do punk rock, heavy metal. We do everything.

Frank—We've just had problems in the past, not many, but when you're playing with ska bands, it seems like the ska band is a little bit more ...

Jerry—A little picky.

Eddie—The purist ska people, I guess, not all of them, but most of them, tend to just want to hear what they want to hear, and that's it, but sometimes they put another band like us in a ska show and it doesn't work.

Frank—It's worked in the past, though. We've done some with good ska bands and it's worked, but for the most part we try to stay with more punk rock, more punk bands.

What kind of philosophy do you put behind your music?

Eddie—I think having fun is the main thing. We want to have fun, that's the only thing. We don't really preach about anything. We don't want to get that many points across. We just want to have people fuckin' forget all the bullshit that they have during the week and everyday life, like jobs and all that crap.

George—We just want people to have fun at the shows. That's what it's all about. Energy, basically.

Eddie—There's no real big point to get across, no real message...

Frank—Even though some of our songs have a message, or maybe people think so, we just basically write about life, everyday stuff. Like if it's something mean or something. If we think it's something that people want to hear, we write about it.

George—Average shit.

Eddie—But it's more fun. We're just a fun band. We just want to get people to move around and have a great time and sing along. Some of the songs we have are serious, but most are just for fun.

Is there any history behind "Revenge of the Nerds"?

Frank—It's kinda like a true story, in a way but not really, about some of the guys in the band who weren't really the popular kids during high school, but kinda the kids who were just there. Nobody really paid attention to them.

George—I think there's a bunch of kids like that. People who are just there and aren't part of the main social crowds.

Frank—In our town in high school, we weren't that popular. But now that we're in a band, all these people who were in high school back then that were completely ass holes to us now come to our shows and tell us that were great and all that shit. So that's what that whole song's about, just kind of a joke about that shit. All the guys that I didn't like in high

school and all the chicks that I didn't like in high school..

George—are nice to you now and you're a little more popular.

Frank—And they all buy our albums. It's kinda funny.

Jerry—'Cause you made the newspaper in your town.

Frank—It's just a joke, though. It's not that we're being spiteful, but that's the whole point of that song. It's our revenge.

(At this point there was an uncomfortable silence) Do you guys have any plans for future albums? Any new songs?

Eddie—We have one new song. That's not bad for us because we usually don't write on the road, we usually write it all in about two months before we record it.

Frank—But our new record just came out so we're not even at the point where we can think about a new album. I'm sure by May or June we'll have more songs.

How is it being on a new label? Is that a lot different?

Frank—It's a lot different. It's a lot better. It's on a bigger scale, you can feel it.

Eddie—There's a lot of support.

Frank—Yeah, there's a whole crew behind us back at home that is only in charge of us. They make phone calls, put ads in paper, and just does everything. It's really great.

George—We don't have to worry about the little stuff at all. They're like our managers in a way. Anytime we need supplies or anything. At Epitaph, they care about their bands. Everybody thinks that they're just some huge thing that got big like some major label, but they're not.

Eddie—They pay their bands better than any other label. I mean, it's not all about money, but when it comes down to money, there's a lot of independent labels that cheat their bands.

Frank—At Epitaph, they give their bands the best deal. It's the coolest place to be. They care more about their bands than any other label.

Eddie—They put their money back into their resources. I mean [Epitaph owner] Brad is a way cool guy. He's got a lot of pressure because he's a millionaire and all, but he's a way cool guy. The bottom line is that he's been in a band so he knows what it's like and he knows how to take care of a band.

George—He's the coolest person and we're going to stay [on Epitaph] as long as we can.

(Editor's Note: This comment by the Glowskulls is especially interesting with the benefit of hindsight. Recently, the media has paid a great deal of attention to the controversy generated when Offspring refused to

re-sign on Epitaph, choosing instead to sign with another, competing major label. The members of Offspring claimed that the label's owner and founder, who the Glowskulls refer to as "Brad," had lost touch with his independent music roots. Read *Rolling Stone* for a broader view of this particular controversy.)

Any certain future plans?

Eddie—Well, we're going to Europe in January. We're basically going to finish this tour and go across the ocean. We're making some videos, we're going to tour Europe, and then we're going to come back and tour the U.S. again.

How long are you guys going to keep playing?

Eddie—As long as it still sounds good to us.

Jerry—As long as it's still fun.

Frank—As long as we can.

George—We'll probably be playing for the rest of our lives. We don't know anything really, except for punk rock, so we'll keep doing it.

Frank—After you get to a certain level, it becomes a business, and then it's time to start thinking about money.

Eddie—If it pays well...

Frank—We've tried really hard to get away from that money thing, but that's what it all really comes down to. This is our job. It's unavoidable. If you don't start asking for money, asking to get paid, then the promoters going to make off with everything and you're left with shit.

How would you describe your music in short?

George—Shit!

Is that an exclamation or an answer?

George—Both.

*Ian "Naki" Brand, if he did indeed write this article, turned 19 today.
He owns cool sunglasses.*

Nathan Bennett: Music For Film, Theatre, and Suburban Milwaukee

by J. Shipman and P. Toutonghi

Those of you who were able to see Dan O'Brien's play, *The Last Supper Restoration*, in the Spring semester of 1996, were probably pleased by the odd music which drifted out towards the audience immediately before several of the scenes. Among the three musicians performing the original score was Nathan Bennett, WRMC's illustrious, former Music Director. Nathan's tenure at the radio station was marked by significant increases in general organization, as well as the implementation of computerized tracking of play lists. His energy expanded into all parts of the station, his strong musical taste touched all forms of new and established music. He is greatly missed.

This interview was conducted in the WRMC office, with a sports talk show droning in the background. The phone was ringing constantly, and Nathan replied to the questions between conversations with record company executives. A senior music major from Colorado, Nathan was responsible for the production of music to go along with many plays and film projects here at Middlebury.

You've just finished the Last Supper Restoration. What other shows have you done?

I did music for two films, *The Mass Balance* and *Plash* by Jim Anderson.

Were those original compositions?

(He nods.)

You also did music for Beyond Therapy?

Well, the sound. Just picking music that seemed to go with character and scenes, getting the basic feel for the play.

Are those the same sort of guidelines that you use when developing your original compositions?

No, the two shows I did, I had written the music before I had seen the film. Basically, he (the director) asked me to do some music, so I sat down and played for awhile, came up with something, and then he put it to the film. For *Mass Balance*, Jim arranged the music. But for *Plash*, the night before the showing, we went in together and put a little more sound to it.

Is it any different to write for a film?

What I try to do is something that can't be reproduced. I can't reproduce any of the sounds on *Mass Balance* or *Plash*.

(Editor's Note: This was an idea which I later found very interesting. So much of today's music—all of it, really—is geared towards mass production. While the advent of the recording device has made music more accesible, it has also shifted the focus of the musical experience from live performance to personal consumption. Many people at Middlebury own twenty CD's, but how many have been two twenty live shows? And while they are performing, how many of today's most popular bands value the quality of their music over the general feeling of their fans in the mosh pit, or over bone-rattling loudness? Not many. Now, I'm not saying that this is a bad thing, neccesarily. I think that it is merely indicative of a switch; American "popular" music—that is, the music heard by the most people—is no longer a communal and unique experience, it is no longer a ritualized connection with a deeper understanding of self, of rhythm, of balance and harmony. It is now some poorly arranged power chords driven by an insistent and monotonous bass, arranged in a way as to sell the most albums. And while Nathan was working in the readily duplicated world of film, his perspective was not commercial one, had nothing to do with pleasing an imagined audience. He tried to make each moment on the soundtrack unique, an expression of the present in which it was created. And I think that's pretty cool.)

So it's more a sound that you going for, rather than an individual song?

Yes, sound quality is definitely more important than a progression. It's really hard to hear original music and see the film for the first

time, because it never seems to work. When Jim and I first watched Plash, neither one of us liked it. It was partially re-arranging and getting used to it until we finally liked it.

Do you have a favorite movie soundtrack?

No.

Any future projects?

I'm re-doing Plash for live instruments, right now I want to use a bowed gong, timpini, prepared piano, electric bass, and water.

Justin Shipman has absconded to England. I am here in front of this computer screen and, as always, Pauls Toutonghi.

On Tour With Phish

by Tie Mudge

Editor's Note: This is basically Tie's concert journal from Winter Break, when he spent some time as a Phishie, going around to various concerts. Besides the three Phish shows, Tie writes about one show by the group Blue Miracle. I greatly enjoyed the details of this piece.

Blue Miracle—12/23/95—Hammerjack's—Baltimore, MD

I was really impressed to find out that Blue Miracle had stepped up to the league of Hammerjack's which, although usually inhabited by hicks from Glen Burnie, can actually become a respectable concert hall. Unfortunately, despite being very easy to find (right next to Camden Yards), driving to Hammerjack's is a very frustrating experience. After getting on and off 95 a couple of times and deciding not to just fuck it and park the car on the side of the road and walk, we figured it out. In case you are interested, take the road just to the right of MLK Boulevard and then a quick left but try not to park under the bridge. Anyway, the band was pretty pumped up and had its old guitarist back. The keyboardist also seemed to be half-sober for once. They broke out with a couple of new songs and had some fairly long jams. They also played two James Brown songs, Santana's Soul Sacrifice, and Edgar Winter's Frankenstein was the encore. After the show, we were quite pleased to find our cars still in working order and bought out some guy's hot dog stand.

New Year's Eve—Madison Square Garden

We missed the closing of the ticket window at the train station so we had to buy them on the train. I was quite pleased to see that over half of the people on the train were already drinking. Another bonus was that because it was so crowded, we were never asked to buy a ticket.

The streets were crowded as was to be expected when I arrived at MSG. Security was almost nonexistent which was both unexpected and appreciated. My seats were stage left and although I had hoped to get onto the floor, we stayed in the general vicinity for the whole show. The excellent view of Fishman obviously added to my entertainment and was invaluable when New Year's struck. They opened with Punch You in the

Eye which set the tone for the first set. There weren't too many jams although many of the songs were crowd favorites. The brief intermission allowed me to buy a Coke and a hot dog for \$10 and finish them before I got back to my seat. The second set was longer than I had anticipated and was capped by a Runaway Jim that seemed to last forever. The second intermission was a bit longer and allowed for my friend (who will remain nameless) to take a nap. Of course, the third and final set was the best as it included old favorites like You Enjoy Myself and Frankenstein. At twelve o'clock they had the Fishman naked and in some sort of diaper. He was slowly lowered from the ceiling in a box with lights on the side of it while the remaining members of the band played that New Years' song. I remember the encore, Johnny B. Goode, because I really wanted to hear a Dead song but was quite disappointed when they didn't come out for a second encore.

Exiting MSG was quite a shock because New York looked like it had been hit by a bomb but really didn't look any worse than usual. Here's the set list:

1ST SET— Punch You in the Eye
 Sloth
 Reba
 Squirming Coil
 Maze
 Colonel Forbin—Shine—Mockingbird
 Sparkle
 Chalkdust Torture

2ND SET— Drowned
 Lizards
 Axila #2
 Runaway Jim
 Strange Design
 Hello My Baby
 Mohawk Song—Dave's Mike's Guide

3RD SET— Countdown
 Auld Lang Syne
 Weekapaw
 Sea and Sand
 You Enjoy Myself

Mouth Jam
Sanity
Frankenstein

ENCORE— Johnny B. Goode

Unity—1/4/96—The 8x10—Baltimore, MD

I was pretty psyched when I entered the 8x10 because it had been renovated to fit alot more people and Unity had already taken the stage. The bouncers told my friends and I that we would be kicked out in fifteen minutes but I guess they were just bluffing. Unity was performing as well as expected and produced a reggae sound that can sound just like BOB if it's loud enough and your mind is altered. I have no clue what songs they played because I really can't tell you the name so any of their songs. Seeing the band also brought back memories of the time that I met the members of the band after they played one of my friend's parties. There were alot of hot girls around as usual and people started selling some nifty African trinkets at the door. I'd give the show a B+ as the band finished up with Wake Up and Live and Exodus.

Solar Circus—1/5/96—The Bank—Baltimore, MD

We arrived at the Bank about a half hour late for he performance but found out there that the band's bus had broken down or something so we were actually about ten minutes early. It didn't really matter because they were playing the Dead at a respectable volume. Scarlet Begonias and Fire on the Mountain are what stick out in my head so they must have been playing an actual show. Solar Circus was dependable as usual which merited their reputation as the "house" band. There weren't really many people, however, perhaps because many had yet to recover from the previous night at the 8x10. I was quite pleased when the band took a break because usually they only play one set. Even better was the fact that the Dead was put on again and that the band had the respect to let Crazy Fingers finish before they went back on. I didn't really notice any new songs on the menu but Laced in Silver was especially pleasing and of course they also played the crowd favorite Stems and Seeds. The show ended around three which was good because I had to make the drive up to Middlebury the next day.

Ode To Slayer

Tight-leather pants, tongues drenched in
watery blood,
colossal on the stage, fork-shaped and black
guitars. They sing their haunting songs and
crack

the eardrums of their happy, white-trash brood.

John Cage once said, over midnight coffee
and cigarettes: "These boys, they rock and yes,
they roll. They roil, they spin and shake, so free
from sound and structures, the calumnious
and horrid self-perpetuation of
pop music." I agree. What brilliance in
the metal genre exists, it floats above,
luminescent, where Slayer's long since been.

If I were any band at all, no doubt,
I would be Slayer, and not Kilgore Trout.

.. Jim Fish

The Ex in Context: Whores, Junkies, and Improvisation

by Jason Mantzoukas

Or: How did the Netherlands' most consistently (mis)labeled "archopunk" band get from the unsubtle politics of its inception to the free improvisation of the new record "Instant"?

Amsterdam was built on mud. The illusion of firm ground is exposed when the wooden pilings supporting the centuries-old city buildings begin to decay. Pounded into filmy wash of the River Amstel until they hit a more solid foundation, the pilings allowed for the appearance of integrity, discredited only when the buildings' right angles fanned precipitously into adjoining structures, streets or canals. One can witness his effect frequently in Amsterdam, a city with a sordid history of hyper-mercantilism.

The material results of Amsterdam's long-term relationship with capitalism, the sanctioned existence of prostitution and soft drug trade, are an unremarkable given to natives. You ain't seen nothing until you've seen the window of an Amsterdam porn shop. The stores around the red-light district celebrate the rare and obscure pleasures of bestiality, piss, shit, and disease. So when an employee at Konkurrent, the Ex-founded local independent music distributor, says, "If it makes money, then it's okay here," there is hardly a touch of overstatement. Whores sell themselves behind red-light district picture windows; an almost immediate cliché of lingerie and jittery come-ons. Thousands of itinerant backpackers

flood the city's smoking "coffeeshops" each year; a group of truly unimaginative pot bars lodged in the backwater dregs of sixties pop music philosophy (christened anything from the Doors to Pink Floyd to "Rasta Baby," etc.) One Californian asked me, "So are you here for the smoke?" as if the affirmative answer was hardly worth giving.

The city's two main drags of prostitution and drug-dealing: Oudezijds Voorburgwal and the Oudezijds Achterburgwal lie in the literal "heart" of Amsterdam's concentric layout of streets and canals, both streets holdovers from the fifteenth-century "golden age" of trading. The story goes that the red-light district emerged out of the demands of the new influx of sex-starved sailors. Today's legalised bazaar of whores, sex shows ("Real Fucking on Stage," claim the signs), and porn shops can be set in clumsy contrast to the decidedly noncommercial bent of the Ex and their eponymous record label. For fifteen years, in a city which not only mostly ignores its local music, even records which sell for as little as half the price of the average disc. As guitarist Terrie says, "For us that kind of way of doing business is just normal. You sell records as cheaply as possible but try to make enough money to put out the next record." In a city where everything and everyone is for sale, the Ex's anti-capitalist stance is a welcome change.

...they are really living for their music; they don't care about money or luxury that other people are looking for, they are just there to make music and all the money that they earn is just put back into the music. They like to bring this music to the people. It's all very honest, with an open heart—no hype or extras.

—Ab Baars—Dutch tenor sax and clarinet player

One conventional role of the rock and roll journalist is the self-effacing channeler of the mythological narrative of "personality". Whether the writer chooses to create a rock and roll tragedy (i.e. Jimi Hendrix, Elvis Presley, Syd Barrett, Brian Wilson, Billie Holiday, etc.) or a rock and roll celebration (the narrative of the rising star, the comeback, or the vindication of obscurity) is usually the result of the writer's own subjective philosophy on the essence of rock and roll. The rock journalist wades into the mess of noise and obliteration to emerge with a coherent mythologizing of his or her subject. So this then is a self-conscious creation of a myth of the Ex, and their unique relationship with Amsterdam's improvisers.

One opinion about the creation of music as commodity is that genre and demographic are irrelevant; the essential commonality must be regeneration. Artists must reinvent themselves in order to survive commercially and artistically. The commercial reinvention arises out of the necessity to remain novel to an audience lead by whim and impulse. Artistic reinvention arises from a self-initiated (some times more self-conscious than others) need to translate and element of the consciousness through a particular medium. The Ex has always seen themselves in the context of the latter definition. The issue at hand resides in The Ex's ability to reinvent itself within its own unremarked upon context. The Ex hardly have an audience to begin with; therefore the necessity of regeneration is hardly a commercial one. It instead seems to emerge from the band's own ideals of creative self-respect. Collaborator Tom Cora explains his take on their evolution: "[T]hey're attracted to fresh music that makes an impact, that takes risks, that doesn't

follow but that blazes trails and gives generous energy and doesn't let...popular taste dictate where it goes."

Bassist Luc explains their fifteen-year career simply: "I think the main reason for the existence for The Ex, or The Ex with guests, is that you've got some inspiration for it."

But how did the Netherlands' most consistently (mis)labeled "archopunk" band get from the unsubtle politics of its inception to the free improvisation of their latest record *Instant*? Some history: The Ex emerged from the Amsterdam squatting culture of the late seventies and early eighties. During this period, to simplify greatly, the act of squatting was transformed, through a number of spontaneous riots revolving around police-enforced evictions, from an action of simple necessity (i.e. housing for the homeless) into a diffuse political movement. In the excellent analysis/history of the Amsterdam squatters, *Cracking the Movement—Squatting Beyond the Media*, the non-author ADILKNO (Foundation for the ADvancement of ILlegal KNOwledge—a Dutch "free association of authors and researchers") argue that the squatters' movement did not exist as such; instead the spontaneous, uncontrollable events which transpired during certain squat evictions caused the media to retrospectively order and demarcate a movement where none existed before. That the squatters bought into this media stultification of the spontaneity from which the initial squatting and confrontations occurred, was the cause, argues ADILKNO, of the squat "movement's" death. Even so, The Ex members believe themselves to have emerged from the punk/squatting subculture of late-seventies Amsterdam and have tended to carry the politically-charged rhetoric throughout their fifteen-year existence. When Jos, The Ex's vocalist tells me, "Squatting was not just about housing, it was an alternative way of life," he

paraphrases the 1981 movement slogan, "Squatting is more than just living." When squatting became political, The Ex were the bullhorn.

Terrie: "When we started then you were in a kind of movement in Amsterdam you played music as a kind of crowbar to get in there and make some simple statements.."

The music was explicitly political and was integral to the members' place in the squats. Records were released with political leaflets and ideology, lyrics blurted somewhat obvious leftist dogma, and benefit concerts were almost the primary mode of performance. Jos: "When we started, it was quite logical to use the music to support the squatting," a desire which has carried over into their current system of supporting themselves. Jos lives in a now-"legalised" squat in the city centre. An abandoned school which, in a type of diplomacy which may seem foreign to outsiders, the Amsterdam authorities, impressed with the work the squatters had been doing to the building, allowed them to stay if they paid a negligible rent. By pooling the income from two part-time jobs, unemployment benefits, and the band's modest income, The Ex makes enough money to live, although it's well under the accepted minimum wage.

In the essay "Into the Gravy", published in 1989, Jos explains the impetus behind The Ex's formation: "[I]t goes without saying that we were inspired by this social movement...because we were squatters ourselves." The Netherlands' punk movement, just catching hold in the late seventies, gave the band all the reason they needed: "Punk was in town, and it seemed there were concerts everywhere. There was a sort of mood of 'hey, wait a second, we can do that too...' And like so many others, we decided to start a band."

That a band born in an era marked by one-shot careers managed not only to survive, but also to evolve towards the radical thrust of free improvisation seems to indicate a sincerity of ideals. But The Ex are not working in isolation within the "punk" label; they have also gained the respect and talents of the old guard of the Dutch improvisors; often players who have vastly greater technical ability than their own. Beginning with the half-improvised album *Blueprints for a Blackout* in 1984, The Ex began a working relationship with the Dutch improvisers which culminated in the latest, completely improvised, two-disc collaboration album entitled *Instant*. But throughout the ten years of frequent concert and recording partnership, the technical gap has never seemed to matter for either camp. For Terrie, the dictates of genre never got in the way of collaboration. "You play with people who you think have something to say with their music; it's not about technical ability or about jazz or rock. You just choose people who have something to say in their own way and then you make music together." Cellist Tom Cora explains the unlikely union: "the people in The Ex have drastically different so-called technical levels but the concerted effort is music that has a big impact and that's always what's been important to me."

Saxophonist Ab Baars also did not feel technical ability limited communication. "[T]here was a certain basic feeling to their music...a soberness to the technical part; just they would use very essential sorts of things. Yeah, it was all very basic and simple. But it had a very direct feeling, and it was always related to a certain atmosphere or to the feel of the composition."

This community introspection and impulse for collaboration with local improvisers is essential to understanding the vital-

ity of the band. Up until the mid-sixties most forms of popular music in the Netherlands were imported. The paucity of the Dutch folk music tradition (dismissed wholesale by everyone I interviewed) combined with the influx of African-American jazz and blues influences led to a kind of diluted imitation until the more open-ended philosophies of Ornette Coleman, John Coltrane, and Eric Dolphy crossed the Atlantic. Beginning in the mid-sixties, improvised music in the Netherlands (and elsewhere) began to flourish as an independent art form.

The emphasis began to be placed on musical performance from within the body of knowledge of the individual who was performing.

Following this trend, The Ex's music grew in similar ways. At first they were inspired by the imported punk rock they heard from England. Then as the conventions of hard-core began to prove limiting, they turned to their own community, including European folk and the innovations of local improvisers in their palette. While it lost them some of their original fan base, the changes led to the respect they now receive among improvisers.

It was through the well-known "drum-heroics" of Han Bennink (to quote American-born drummer and Zorn collaborator Michael Vatcher) which The Ex entered the Dutch improvised music world. Where Terrie is more direct ("Han Bennink was really the first inspiration from that scene"), ICP member Ab Baars is more detailed:

"[T]hey started coming to the Bim House [Amsterdam's main venue for radical improvisation] because of Han Bennink and after a concert of the ICP, I started talking to them because it was very strange to see that sort of person in the Bim House because there was always a certain-looking type of person that

came to these concerts; never punk people. So we started playing and they liked my playing so they invited me to play a concert together with Wolter Weirbos, the trombone player."

Jos related how this relationship found a place in the band's recordings:

"It also had to do with the *Joggers and Smoggers* (1989) album [which featured performances from Thurston Moore and Lee Renaldo]. We wanted to have people on the album that somehow inspired us and we wanted to see if they wanted to contribute to that album so we asked a lot of people if they were interested. We had some pieces for each so they could do something but we also noticed that when we were working together we clicked not just musically but as people. The album was recorded on a friendly basis and not just as people plugging in, playing and then going away. And from that point on we also thought, 'well, maybe we can do a concert together' and see what comes from that."

So *Instant* was not as radical a career move as it may seem on the outside; for Luc, "it was a logical step to take, an album growing out of a relationship which has been evolving for ten years. He continues, "We had been working with a lot of these people and thought it would be beautiful to put all those pieces together."

In this way, The Ex has come to work and tour with some of the most important figures in the Dutch improv world. They have remained buoyant and essential through collaboration, the credo which lends the best techno its vitality.

So although they would deny it, with the release of *Instant*, a record which features Bennink, Baars, Weirbos, Vatcher, and draw heavily from Amsterdam's improvisation tradition (the title obviously derived from Mengelberg's ICP), The Ex now seems a part of the uniquely Dutch improvised music which has given the country a musical

jolt. "I think that the way we function, [is] actually a kind of folk music, I think. Not the music itself, but the tradition of it," bassist Luc says.

And that The Ex view themselves as practitioners of a kind of twentieth-century folk should come as no surprise. The best folk music emerges from a community and voices community concerns. In the business of selling music, the term "folk" has come to clas-

sify a vapid, acoustic version of electrified pop music. Folk music is no longer a broad simplification of the infinite possibilities of the untrained musician, but a mediocre industry genre which happens to feature acoustic instruments. Because of this unfortunate dilution of the word, any attempt to describe The Ex in these terms is likely to be misinterpreted. So The Ex's "folk" roots need to be understood in the context of the music of revolution. think of Woody Guthrie or the music of the Tennessee coal miner strikes. This sense of folk music was what fueled the creation of arguably The Ex's high-water mark, their two albums recorded with New York cellist Tom Cora: *Scrabbling at the Lock* (1991) and *And the Weathermen Shrug Their Shoulders* (1993). Cora explains the impetus for their collaboration: "[Folk is] a music of a community of people, that's happening in a community and New York was a really strong community for me and I think that Amsterdam had a really strong community—the punk squat scene. Ö, for example, was a kind of urban folk music and it was a different urban folk music in New York, but some of the same sensibilities were shared and I think part of the attraction between The Ex and me was perhaps those shared sensibilities. You know—I think it is a very attractive media point of view to think of mixing this together with that and it's a kind of fashionable world music sensibility [...] for us the attraction was what we shared."

Their fruitful relationship with Cora now ended, Instant just released and a limited European tour recently completed, The Ex are taking some time off to work on other projects, the most interesting of which, *Roof*, features Luc playing alongside Tom Cora (once again), vocalist Phil Minton, and drummer Michael Vatcher. Whether or not Instant hints at a direction which will be mined further by the band remains to be seen. Their live show is still decidedly rock and roll, improvisation taking a more complimentary role in the mix. But The Ex has never been solely about music. As Terrie says, "[Our political stance] has to do with the way you live and what you eat and the way you do everything. It's all one thing. You don't have to make simple statements about it. It comes out in the way you play, the way you put out your records, the way you distribute your records."

Jos writes, "[W]e're not stuck to one sacred formula (it's not fucking pop music!)...For us life is about cooperation and solidarity, not about egotism, greed or competition."

Words from which, it seems, the music "industry" could learn.

Recordings available which feature Amsterdam improvisers with The Ex:

Blueprints for a Blackout (1984)

Joggers and Smoggers (1989)

Scrabbling at the Lock (1991)

And the Weathermen Shrug Their Shoulders (1993)

Instant (1995)

Bimhuis 290691 (2x7" plus guests, 1991)

Live at the Bimhuis (video plus guests, 1992)

Editor's Note: I found this article in the FMphasis file. I assume that it is **Jason Matzoukas'** work, as he was hanging around when it was written in March, and was our jazz director for several years. Jason is currently doing research related to his Watson Fellowship project on Jazz in Africa. We apologize if this was not intended for our use; it was published in sincere appreciation of a strong article.

Soap Box

by Rusty Dolleman

The worst thing about my summer was not boredom, sexual frustration, or watching my family happily slurp down ice-cold cans of "Milwaukee's Best Light" in front of my face on sweltering August afternoons. It wasn't working in a shoe-moulding factory in Lewiston, Maine, or even the fact that all of my friends from high school apparently decided that marijuana was way more fun than girls ever were. No, the worst thing about my summer vacation was that there were certain times that it was impossible for me to get away from modern rock radio. At school, I am shielded from the horror of alternative programming by my CD collection, but in the car and at work, there was nowhere to hide. As a result, I heard Metallica's "Until it Sleeps" an average of 8.6×10^{23} times per day, an experience which raised the question "Where *do* I take this pain of mine?" Anyway, I returned to school much deluded with the current state of rock and roll, and with this list of

THE FIVE WORST ALTERNATIVE ROCK SONGS OF THE 1990'S

As everyone knows, The worst song of the 1980's was undoubtedly Gregg Allman's utterly ridiculous bad-boy anthem "I'm No Angel", in which he beckons us seductively with lyrics like "Come and let me show you my tattoo." It was much trickier to pick clear losers from the current decade, since there has been an unprecedented amount of pure garbage disseminated in such a short amount of time. I don't blame Nirvana, but would they really have released "Smells Like Teen Spirit" if they had known it would have given rise to that goddamned Presidents of the United States of America song that goes "Moving to the country / Gonna eat a lot of peaches"? I don't think so.

Before I begin I would like to give a nod to some honorable mentions. This was a very difficult list to compile, and I know that no one will be satisfied with it, especially since there are two notable exceptions from the list, those being Hootie and the Blowfish and Alanis Morissette. Somehow, I just can't churn up the fanatical hatred most people have for Hootie, even

though they do admittedly suck. They're just not obnoxious enough for me to truly despise them, and they seem justifiably embarrassed by their stardom. Alanis, of course, is plenty obnoxious and not the least bit ashamed of the putrid, pretentious filth she likes to call "lyrics", but she just didn't make the cut. "Hand in my Pocket" was close though, very close. Call that one number six if you wish. So here they are, in order of increasing offensiveness, the Five Worst Alternative Rock Songs of the 1990's (so far anyway).

5. Tripping Daisy-"I've Got a Girl."- Someday, when all of our children are listening to Broadway show tunes and snorting Ajax, we'll look back on the decline of Western society and attribute it to songs like this. Since when has rock and roll become a forum for sickening, banal, *cuteness*? How did we get from "Welcome to the Jungle, it gets worse here every day/ If you want you're going to bleed, but that's the price you pay" to "I've got a girl she lives with me/I've got a girl she smells so sweetly" in less than a decade? There is no place in rock and roll for such unparalleled, uncompromising wussiness. I mean, what's next, songs about stuffed animal collections and/or pussy willows? Whenever I hear the lines "I've got a girl, she wears cool shoes/I've got a girl she wears them in the nude", I try to visualize the original lineup of Black Sabbath devouring Tripping Daisy for a light snack, and I almost feel better.

4. The Proclaimers- "1000 Miles"- I don't really feel that any explanation is necessary here, but I do have one question. After they recorded the final take of this abomination, did any of the record execs, recording technicians, or even the artists themselves really believe, in their heart of hearts, that what they had just inflicted upon the world was anything less than complete, utter sewage? I just wish the studio janitor had felt more secure in his employment to "speak out against the madness".

3. Insert your least favorite Collective Soul song here.- Collective Soul is one of those bands that record companies put out in order to attract yuppies and Republicans to the alternative scene, sort of like Alternative Lite or something. I can just here the dinner-party conversation on the Upper East Side- "Muffy, had you heard the new Collective Soul album? Why, those chaps are

absolutely smashing! I do say, that alternative music is all the rave these days. Come on darling, put those stock reports away and, as those crazy kids say, let's gel!"

2. The Refreshments- "Banditos"- By far the worst of a bad crop of songs endlessly and ruthlessly overplayed this summer, this song indeed proves its main assertion, that "The world is full of stupid people." I can't believe we've sunk so low that it is acceptable to mention Star Trek in a major label release (Next Generation Star Trek, no less). Whenever I hear the chorus of this song, I am reminded of that long-ago Saturday Night Live skit starring William Shatner, in which he is addressing a Trekkie convention and is dismayed at the collection of lifeless losers assembled before the podium. At one point, he harangues a Vulcan-eared Jon Lovitz, asking "You, have you ever kissed a girl? (Lovitz looks down at his feet) I didn't think so!"

1. Tom Cochrane-"Life is a Highway, I Want to Ride it All Night Long"- I am aware that there have been court cases involving Judas Priest and Ozzy Osbourne regarding the effect of their songs on troubled teenagers, but if anyone really wants to stop teen suicide they should burn more copies of this song. I know that whenever I hear it, death seems welcoming, safe, and warm, and I long to sleep forever, leaving this hard and cruel existence behind me.

One final note: In addition to the aforementioned big acts which didn't make the list, there is the matter of Oasis. The reason I left them out is very simple. I feel that it is essential for the assurance of my continued sanity that I refuse to believe that such a band exists, much less has millions and the adoration of countless twelve to fourteen year-olds across the planet. Liam who?

Rusty Dolleman is the official staff opinions writer. Anyone who wishes to complain about his opinions can drop by Hadley and meet Mr. Chainsaw. However, I feel that I must point out that his opinions about Oasis are not the official opinions of the staff, nor correct.

The Festival Dance

One dips blackbird deep in night,
coughs and throws across the light,
a dark thresh,
a mass—
a might.

There is, also, a laughing life,
to hide the light.
And she smiles:

Ruin beauty, better black
and toss about the night.

The casts of old men come roasting,
tearing off their skins, the magic
is begun, the dance for this:

Ruin beauty, better black
and toss across the light.

.. Jeremy Dean

Record Reviews

by the Ear Man

THE CARDIGANS . *first band on the moon*

The job of any CD reviewer often comes down to figuring out clever names under which to classify the bands that he reviews. I refuse to do this.

That said, I must say that I greatly enjoyed the new and attractively packaged album from the Swedish group, The Cardigans. Released in the United States by Mercury Records, *first band on the moon* is a seamless continuation of their first album, *Life*. Though the instrumentation on this one is fuller and fresher—with a lush and almost orchestral sound that includes melodious violins, flutes, trumpets, saxophones and cellos—the energetic and soft beat which marked *Life* returns to drive this record.

Nina Persson's seductive vocals are, as always, the focus of the band's swirling efforts. Her voice is a high one, located in pitch somewhere below Robert Plant, yet firmly out of the 'I-can-sing-along-comfortably' range. If her lyrics are not shockingly revelatory, or as many-layered as Dostoevsky, they are at least pleasant to listen to, and do not descend into the mire of cliché.

The distinction between the Cardigans and the sea of bands that is College Radio is difficult to define, yet very present. Hailing from the wind-swept shores of Sweden, the Cardigans bring a distinctly non-American flair to their music. This new album has gone double-platinum in Japan within two weeks of its release.

The individual songs are beautiful, many of them, and far from formulaic. Especially noteworthy are *losers*, *happymeal II*, and the first track, *your new cuckoo*. The most surprising track on the album, possibly the most surprising track on an album so far this year, is the cover of the metal anthem Iron Man, which was first penned in the 70's by Black Sabbath. Done by the Cardigans, this song is a brilliant, eminently listenable tune, and

would undoubtedly make Ozzy turn over in his grave, were he dead. This particular cover shows off the band's sense of humor, which, when you hear over two hundred CDs per week, is always a plus.

All said and done (though mostly said), this is a wonderful album, one of my favorites this year. Buy it, if you're into that whole consumerism thing. And if you're not, well, your welcome to drop by Howie's house and give it a listen. Or just tune in to 91.1 FM, WRMC, the greatest radio station in the world.

JON JANG SEXTET . *Two Flowers On A Stem*

This record came to my attention because of its cover.

I'll admit it. I was drawn in by the album cover—an arrangement of two orchid cross-sections in a beautiful, pink floral design that floats out from the otherwise black paper. Expecting to be disappointed by the music (clever packaging is so common among purveyors of poor music these days), I popped the CD in our trusty CD player, and said to myself that I would give it twenty seconds to impress me in some way.

From the first note—a mournful, twisting ribbon of sound that resounded from what I soon found out was an erhu (pronounced are-who)—I was captivated, drawn by the lamentations of this odd instrument, played so skillfully by Chen Jiebling. The erhu has the tenor and vulnerability of a bird's voice. But this comparison is dependent on you sitting there in Proctor and trying to imagine a fairly large bird—because there is no quaking in its voice, no uneven ending of the erhu's call. It is clear sound, each note a beautiful consistency.

The record's first track is a strange juxtaposition of musical statements. The erhu provides a distinct and unquestionable classical Chinese presence within the song (which is the title piece, *Two Flowers On A Stem*). The rhythm section, however, gives it a pulsating and inconsistent beat; the music has an open feeling because of this, one which is kinda like the anticipation of a comforting embrace. The saxophone that Jon Jang throws in (this is his original composition) intrudes a soulful, if somewhat disquieting, jazzy note to the piece. Truly an odd, but

wonderful, sound.

The second track on the album made me even more happy, as the sextet tackled Charles Mingus' crazy, swirling piece—Meditations on Integration. I am not the person to comment on Mingus; many, many have tried, and some have even succeeded. I was pleased by this ambitious attempt at covering a nearly un-cover-able song, penned by one of the geniuses of 20th century jazz composition.

Noteworthy are David Murray's free solos on the third track, Elanor Bumpurs (another original Jon Jang piece), as is all the instrumental work. The other tracks do not disappoint. This is an extremely challenging, and extremely rewarding album. It is available on Soul Note records at any store near you!

SOL Y CANTO . *sendero del sol*

"La musica buena de guitarra no existria sin buenas guitarras," claim Rosi and Brian Amador, the lead singer and music director of Sol y Canto, respectively. I agree. Although, I had the benefit of the English translation in the liner notes to come to this conclusion.

What they said is: "Good guitar music would not exist without good guitars." And luckily, since this statement is prominently featured within the liner notes of their CD, they have good guitars. They also have good percussion, bass, keyboards, flutes, accordions, and vocals. But then again, I have a weakness for Spanish, and most of their lyrics are contained within beautiful Spanish melodies.

This album is definitely a happy one. While The Cardigans made me smile and want to sing along (but ultimately realize the impossibility of this desire) and the Jon Jang Sextet made me reflect on a host of things and ideas, Sol y Canto made me tap my feet and bob my head to the beat. They are extremely 'together' as a musical entity, and weave a tight musical rope, each instrument making its presence known as an equally strong hemp fiber (I am taking this metaphor way too far, I know). The group stays firmly within the Latin American musical terrain, as their album cover readily demonstrates, with its pictures of

congas, acoustic guitar, bata drums, shekere, guiro and pandereta.

Language association being what it is, listening to the fourth song, *Gracias a la vida*, at extremely loud volumes, turned the WRMC studio into a smoky bar within Republican territory in 1937 Spain. Rosi and Brian Amador's slow, measured vocals made the peasants sitting at the bar sway on their stools. The farmer with the rifle strapped across his chest lit a cigarette with a match, shielding the flame with the palm of his hand. In that moment, I saw the wrinkles in his skin, the winding lines that were as tangled as any thoughts about country or revolution. Ernest Hemmingway sat in the corner, drinking cheap red wine, scribbling in a black leather notebook.

This melancholy mood was replaced by the upbeat rhythm of the fifth song, a trend that continued for the rest of the album. I like this record, too, as you can probably tell. But why write extremely happy record reviews, you ask? Well, why not celebrate good music? Oh, I see. Because life is a series of painful disappointments and losses, offset only by the rare and delusional moment of happiness? Nah. Lots of records suck. Probably most of the records you own suck. I know this is true with me. But these three albums were all good. Now you know about them. You are permitted one small and delusional moment of joy.

Sol y Canto's most recent album, *Sendero Del Sol*, is available on Rounder Records.

Walk

& impulse! nacre-hewn wings,
 shimmer over the taupe tableau
 & the cauterized soles, sweet
sweet sweet asphalt
 in yr mouth.

I've had this dream six times, now.

.. *Pauls Toutonghi*

Looking For a Hip-Hop Conscience in the Land of Cadillacs

by Chris Vourlias

When Dre and Big Boi, a/k/a Outkast ("Operating Under The Krooked American System Too long," chides Big Rube, a friend of the group) dropped their debut album Southernplayalisticadillacmuzik back in 1994, the vibrations not only rocked the under-ground, but the surface world of hip-hop as well. Critics heaped praise upon the duo's first effort, which successfully combined soulful, Southern grooves with socially conscious lyrics - a daunting task in a hip-hop environment that seemed to allow gun-toting, wannabe thugs to flourish, while many a dope aspiring MC was left without a dotted line to sign. The result was a brilliant debut, dealing more with societal ills than "pimpin' ho's and slammin' Cadillac doe's."

Now, in the nine-six, Atlanta's finest return with their sophomore album, ATLiens. And any concerns heads may have about the group falling off can toss them into the garbage can like four-day-old grits. Although the album lacks a party anthem like "Player's Ball," the first single to hit the street off Playalistic, or the hedonistic despondency of "Crumblin' Erb," an underground classic, there is a certain maturity - both musically and lyrically - present on ATLiens that seemed to be lacking on the group's debut.

On the production tip, the boys at Organized Noize seemed to have gotten all the kinks out of their system. Musically, the album is on point from start to finish, so you won't have to worry about hitting the fast forward button on every other track. The first single, "Elevators (Me and You)," comes eerie like the theme from the Twilight Zone, while songs like "Jazzy Belle," "Babylon," and "Mainstream" bring a deep, spiritual sound to the album. It hits with an all-around tightness and consistency that was missing from Playalistic. The beats are heavy and complex, with layer upon layer of guitar and piano and drums being blanketed over deep, dark, soulful vocals. Each

song hits with a morbid intensity that most other albums never come close to reaching.

Although the production on ATLiens is tight like chicken ass, the true gem of this album is its lyrical depth and maturity. Whereas Big Boi spat on "Player's Ball": "I'm leanin' back/ my elbows out the window/ Cold rum an' indo fills my body/ Where's the party?", Dre returns on the second album's title track:

*Softly,
As if I'm playin' piano in the dark.
Found a way to channel my anger
Now to embark.
The world's a stage
And everybody's got to play a part.
God works in mysterious ways,
So when he starts
The job of speaking through us
We be so sincere
With this here:
No drugs or alcohol
So I can get the signal clear.
This day,
Put my glock away -
I got a stronger weapon
That never runs out of ammunition,
So I'm ready for war, okay?*

The lyrics on ATLiens are constantly coming deeper than a prostitute's vagina, as the group spits out sermons like Cardinal O'Connor on crack. In "Ova Da Wudz," Dre drops lines that'll soon have every record company CEO shittin' in his drawers.

*Everybody wanna get signed
But record companies act like pimps.
Getting paid off what we made
When we the ones that fly like blimps.
But ain't no Goodyear
I tell it like it is so I'm like look here:*

*Just willin' to get what I deserve -
My kids to have a mother
An a li'l house
With a dog in the backyard
Goin' "Woof, woof!"
Who knows what I must face
When I leave this recording booth?*

Even the guest spots on ATLiens hit hard and true. On "Mainstream," T-Mo of the Goodie Mob spits: "It ain't just the police/ we kill each other/ destruction of the brother/ fast living'll get you took/ thinkin' it can't happen to you/ and then it do/ Oh - crooked schemes/ that's just a dream/ floatin' face-down in the Mainstream."

With their second album, Dre and Big Boi establish their positions at the forefront of hip-hop erudition, placing themselves side by side with such "teachers" as Jeru the Damaja and the legendary KRS-One. At a time when most rappers are all about Moet and Versace and Franklins and forty-fives, Outkast is coming with spirituality and upliftment and maturity and consciousness. ATLiens stands as perhaps the most significant album the rap world has seen this year, and marks an important step in the continuous progression and development of hip-hop.

Thank you for taking the time to read our publication. If you have any questions, comments, concerns, or replies, please contact: Pauls Toutonghi, Box 3714, Middlebury College, Middlebury, Vermont, 05753. He can be reached by phone at (802) 443-4337, or, on campus, extension 4337.

